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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [OSCE](#) [AF](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: AFGHAN OFFICIALS WERE NO-SHOWS AT  
OSCE COUNTERNARCOTICS TRAINING

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On June 26, Political Officer provided an overview of INL cooperation with Turkmenistan to an OSCE-organized counternarcotics training course for Customs officials carried out at the Ashgabat "Golden Century" Customs Training Center. The ten participants were supervisory-level officials from throughout Turkmenistan. The four-week course was divided into two weeks of basic training about counternarcotics interdiction and two weeks of train-the-trainer training for the same group. At the conclusion of the course, the OSCE-sponsored trainers will observe the Turkmen supervisors as they conduct training for their subordinates. Melton said the participants were already familiar with much of the substance of the course, which had been planned especially to address the lack of capacity among Afghan customs officials. He noted, however, that the discussion of international agencies and cooperation in the fight against illegal narcotics was new information for the trainees, and that the overview of INL assistance to Turkmenistan reinforced that message.

¶2. (C) The training was carried out by retired U.S. Customs official Richard Melton and British specialist Michael Sandy. Melton explained that the training project was initially conceived as a way of increasing cross-border cooperation between Turkmen and Afghan customs officials. Participants were to include ten Afghan customs officials and six of their Turkmen counterparts. Although both sides agreed to the training, in the end, the Afghan side did not send any participants. Melton, who has previously worked in Afghanistan, thought there was no one on the Afghan side willing or able to make the decision to send participants. He also suggested that the potential Afghan participants would have resisted attending because it would have meant foregoing more profitable activities at home for the duration of the training. Before it became clear that the Afghans would be no-shows, the Turkmen on short notice urged the OSCE to move the training to the remote Imamnazar border post on the Turkmen-Afghan border. Melton thought the government had second thoughts about having ten Afghans in Ashgabat for a month.

¶3. (C) After the Afghans failed to show up, the number of

Turkmen officials was increased to ten. Included in the course were three days of planned practical activities at various sites, however the government did not approve any activities outside of the training center, so Melton said they had to stretch six days of classroom work to cover nine days. He said involvement by the participants was acceptable, with about two-thirds showing genuine interest and engagement. Since the project will continue until mid-August, Melton hoped they would be able to arrange some joint Turkmen-Afghan training or consultations in the remaining time, most likely to take place at Imamnazar and involving lesser numbers of officials from both sides.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Although an excellent concept, the execution of this joint training effort, intended to reinforce cross-border communication between Turkmen and Afghans, was undermined by a lack of buy-in from the Afghan side. The resulting Turkmen-only course, not designed specifically to address their level of experience and needs, is making the best of the situation. It should, however, build the capacity of supervisors to conduct training, a skill that would have broad application beyond counternarcotics efforts.

On the side, the director of the training center mentioned that this year they completed a dormitory and dining room at the center and plan to organize a year-round training schedule, rotating customs officials through the center on a regular basis. END COMMENT.

MILES